



Equal opportunity through knowledge and research

Women in Independent Film, 2015-16

**Center for the Study of Women in Television &
Film, San Diego State University**

Dr. Martha M. Lauzen

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Key Findings

•**High profile film festivals in the U.S. screened more than 3 times as many narrative films directed by men as by women.** The 23 high-profile festivals considered in this study screened an average of 5 narrative features directed by at least one woman versus an average of 18 features directed exclusively by men.

•**U.S. festivals screened twice as many documentaries directed by men as by women.** The festivals in this study screened an average of 8 documentaries directed by at least one woman compared with an average of 16 directed exclusively by men.

•**Women's representation as directors on independent films screening at the festivals considered increased from 23% in 2014-15 to 28% in 2015-16.** This figure is slightly below a recent historical high of 29% in 2011-12.

•**By genre, women are much more likely to direct documentaries than narrative features.** Women accounted for 35% of directors on documentaries versus 19% of directors on narrative features.

•**Overall, women's representation in key behind-the-scenes roles is stagnant.** In 2015-16, women comprised 25% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers. This represents a decrease of one percentage point from 26% in 2014-15, and an increase of one percentage point from 24% in 2008-09.

•**Women continue to enjoy higher employment on documentaries than on narrative features.** Women accounted

for 29% of individuals working on documentaries versus 23% of those working on narrative features.

•**In those festivals that feature competitions, films by women directors were placed in those competitions at a rate just slightly higher than women director's overall representation on the films screened at the festivals.** Women comprised 28% of directors overall, and 30% of directors with films in competition.

•**Films with at least one woman director also had higher percentages of women writers, editors, and cinematographers.** In films with at least one female director, women comprised 74% of writers vs. 6% on films directed exclusively by men. In films with women directors, women accounted for 43% of editors compared with 15% on films directed exclusively by men. In films with women directors, women comprised 20% of cinematographers versus 8% on films directed exclusively by men.

Method

This report provides employment figures for domestically and independently produced feature-length documentaries and narrative films screening from May 2015 through April 2016 at the following 23 festivals: AFI Fest; Atlanta Film Festival; Austin Film Festival; Chicago International Film Festival; Cinequest Film Festival; Cleveland International Film Festival; Florida Film Festival; Hamptons International Film Festival; Los Angeles Film Festival; Nashville Film Festival; New Directors, New Films; New York Film Festival; Palm Springs International Film Festival; Rhode Island International Film

Festival; St. Louis International Film Festival; San Francisco International Film Festival; Santa Barbara International Film Festival; Seattle International Film Festival; Slamdance Film Festival; Sundance Film Festival; SXSW Film Festival; Telluride Film Festival; Tribeca Film Festival. *Women in Independent Film* is the most comprehensive study of women's behind-the-scenes employment on independent films available.

The study tracks the sex of directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on every U.S. feature-length film screened at the festivals considered. In total, *Women in Independent Film* considers 9,873 credits on 1,036 films in 2015-16, and over 49,000 credits on more than 5,000 films over the period of 2008 to 2016.

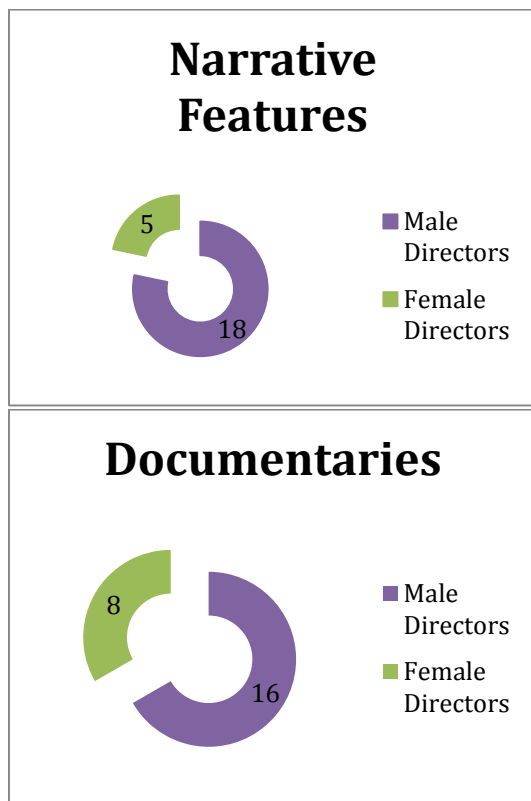
The findings of the study are divided into four major sections. The first section reports the overall figures for women working on documentaries and narrative features. The second section provides the numbers for women working on documentaries only, and the third section reports the figures for women working on narrative features only. The fourth section discusses important relationships between women directors and the gender of those working in other key behind-the-scenes roles.

This report provides comparisons of the data gathered for the present study (2015-16) with data collected from 2014-15, 2013-2014, 2011-2012 and 2008-2009.

Overall Findings for Documentaries and Narrative Features Screening at Festivals

- The festivals considered in this study screened an average of 5 narrative features directed by at least one woman versus an average of 18 narrative features directed exclusively by men (see Figure 1).
- The festivals screened an average of 8 documentaries directed by at least one woman compared with an average of 16 directed exclusively by men.

*Figure 1.
Average No. of Films Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Screened at Festivals*



- Women accounted for 25% of directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on domestically and independently produced feature-length films (documentaries and narrative features). This represents a decrease of one percentage point from 2014-15, and an increase of one percentage point from 2008-09. These findings indicate that women’s employment on independent films has stagnated over the last eight years (see Figure 2).

*Figure 2.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women Working on Independent Features*



- On all of the films considered, women fared best as producers (31%), followed by directors (28%), writers (23%), executive producers (21%), editors (21%), and cinematographers (11%) (see Figure 3).

- In 2015-16, women comprised 28% of directors working on the films considered. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 23% in 2014-15, and an increase of 6 percentage points from 22% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 23% of writers on the films considered in 2015-16. This is even with the figure from 2014-15, and represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

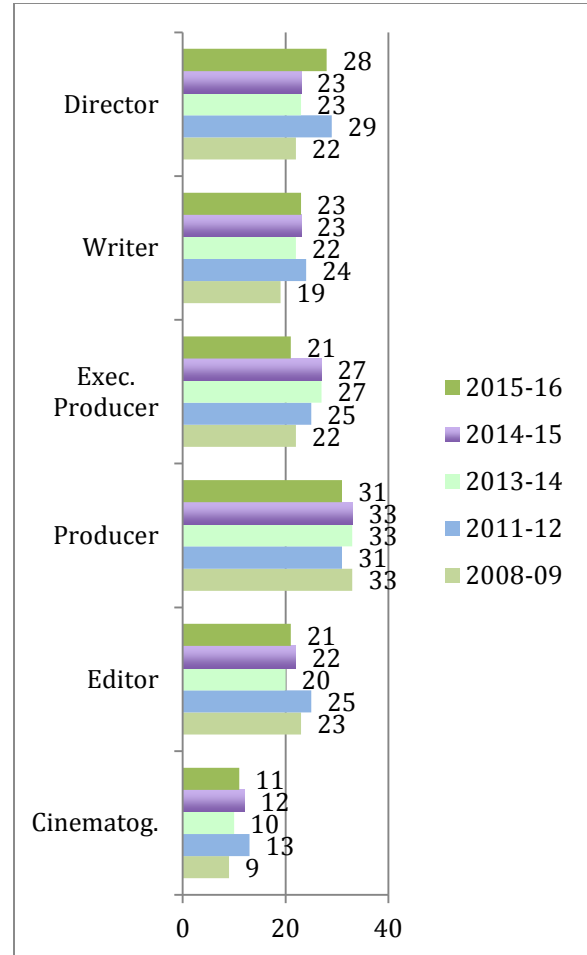
- Women accounted for 21% of executive producers in 2015-16. This represents a decrease of 6 percentage points from 27% in 2014-15, and a decrease of 1 percentage point from 22% in 2008-09.

- In 2015-16, women comprised 31% of producers. This represents a decrease of 2 percentage points from 33% in 2014-15, and from 2008-09.

- In 2015-16, women comprised 21% of editors. This represents a slight decline of 1 percentage point from 22% in 2014-15, and a decline of 2 percentage points from 23% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 11% of cinematographers in 2015-16. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 12% in 2014-15, and an increase of 2 percentage points from 9% in 2008-09.

*Figure 3.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Independent Features by Role*



- In those festivals offering competitions, women comprised 30% of the directors on the films chosen to compete. This is slightly above the percentage of women directors overall (28%).

- Women accounted for 27% of the writers on the films included in these competitions. This is 4 percentage points above women’s representation as writers overall (23%).

Findings for Documentaries Only

- Overall, women comprised 29% of individuals working on documentaries in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. This represents a decrease of 1 percentage point from 30% in 2014-15.

- Women fared best as producers (35%) and directors (35%), followed by writers (31%), executive producers (27%), editors (22%), and cinematographers (15%) (see Figure 4).

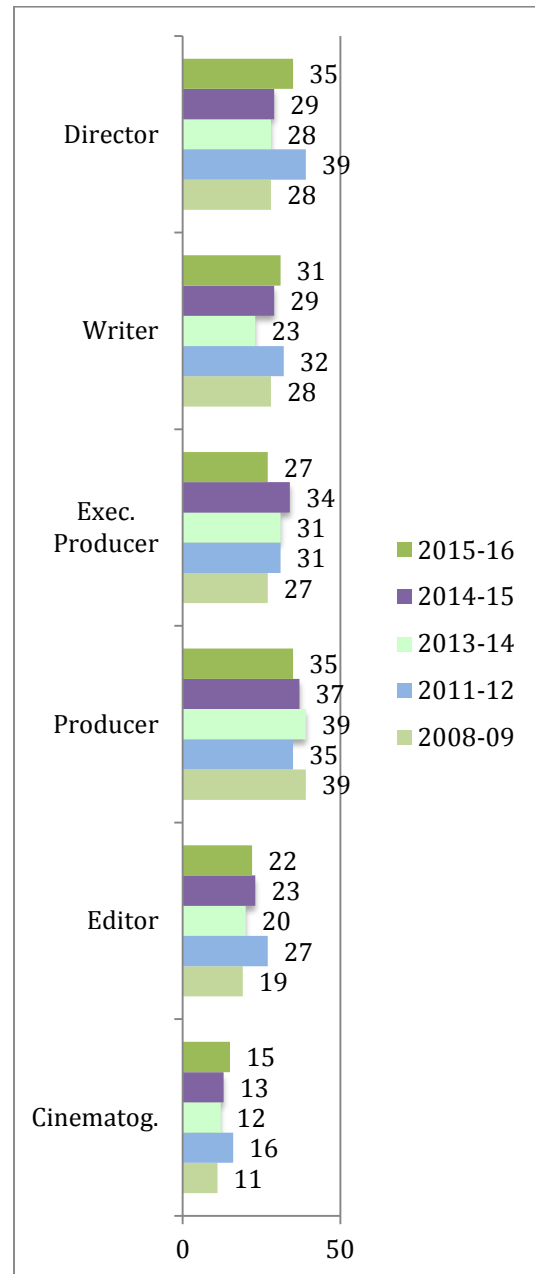
- Women comprised 35% of directors working on documentaries screening at the festivals considered in 2015-16. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 29% in 2014-15, and an increase of 7 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09. However, the figure from this year’s study does not represent a recent historical high. The high was achieved in 2011-12 when women accounted for 39% of those directing documentaries.

- Women accounted for 31% of writers working on documentaries in 2015-16. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 29% in 2014-15, and an increase of 3 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 27% of executive producers working on documentaries in 2015-16. This represents a decrease of 7 percentage points from 34% in 2014-15, and is even with the figure achieved in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 35% of producers working on documentaries in 2014-15. This represents a decrease of 2 percentage points from 37% in 2014-15,

Figure 4.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Documentaries by Role



- and a decrease of 4 percentage points from 39% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 22% of editors working on documentaries in 2015-16. This represents a slight decrease of 1 percentage point from 23% last year, and an increase of 3 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 15% of cinematographers working on documentaries in 2015-16. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 13% last year, and an increase of 4 percentage points from 11% in 2008-09.

Findings for Narrative Features Only

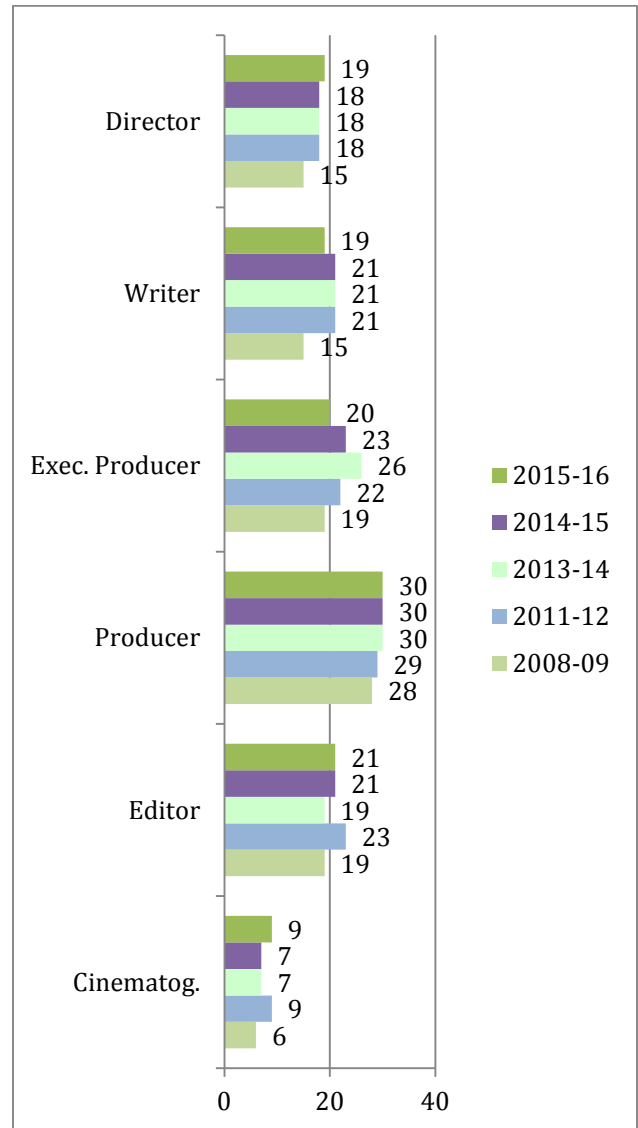
- Overall, women comprised 23% of individuals working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered on narrative features in 2015-16. This represents a decrease of 1 percentage point from 24% in 2014-15.

- Women fared best as producers (30%), followed by editors (21%), executive producers (20%), directors (19%) and writers (19%), and cinematographers (9%) (see Figure 5).

- Women accounted for 19% of directors working on narrative features screening at the festivals considered in 2015-16, an increase of 1 percentage point from 18% in 2014-15, and an increase of 4 percentage points from 15% in 2008-09.

- In 2015-16, women comprised 19% of writers working on narrative features. This represents a decrease of 2 percentage points from 21% in 2014-15, but an increase of 4 percentage points from 15% in 2008-09.

*Figure 5.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Narrative Features by Role*



- Women accounted for 20% of executive producers working on narrative features in 2015-16. This represents a decrease of 3 percentage points from 23% in 2014-15, but an increase of 1 percentage point from 19% in 2008-09.

- In 2015-16, women comprised 30% of producers working on narrative features. This is even with the figure from 2014-15 but represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 21% of editors working on narrative features last year. This is even with the figure from 2014-15 and represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 9% of cinematographers working on narrative features in 2015-16. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 7% in 2014-15, and an increase of 3 percentage points from 6% in 2008-09.

Important Relationships

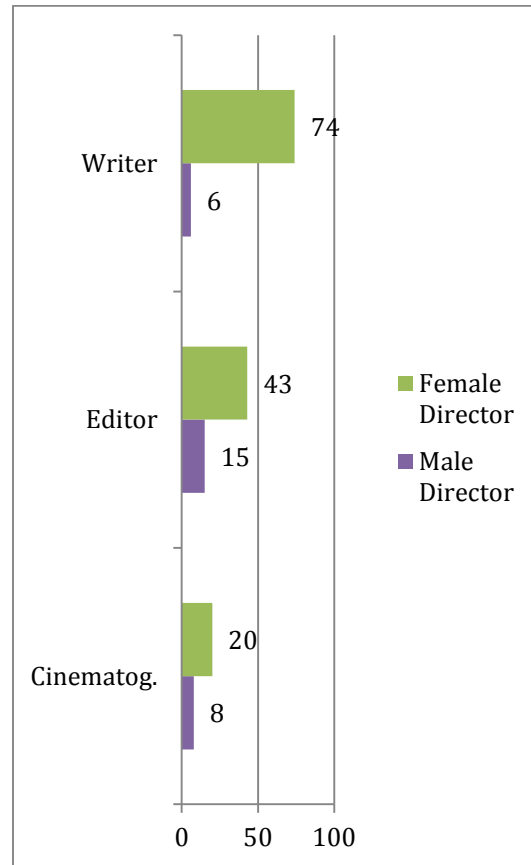
- Films with at least one woman director had higher percentages of women writers, editors, and cinematographers than films with exclusively male directors (see Figure 6).

- On films with at least one woman director, women accounted for 74% of writers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 6% of writers. In part, but not in full, this difference can be explained by the fact that often directors are also writers on independent features.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 43% of editors. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 15% of editors.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 20% of cinematographers. On films with

*Figure 6.
Comparison of Employment of Behind-the-Scenes Women on Films with At Least One Women Director vs. Films with Exclusively Male Directors*



exclusively male directors, women accounted for 8% of cinematographers.

About the Center

The *Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film* at San Diego State University is home to the longest running and most comprehensive studies of women’s behind-the-scenes employment and portrayals in television and film. Dedicated to producing the most up-to-date research available on women in film and television, studies generated by the Center provide the foundation for a realistic discussion of

women's employment and representation. For more information, visit the Center's website at

<http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu> or contact Dr. Lauzen at lauzen@mail.sdsu.edu.